

Berkeley Lab Lessons Learned

AUGUST, 1998

Inadvertent Release of Washwater to the Storm Drain

Background:

Washwater used in the decontamination of the old Hazardous Waste Handling Facility was mistakenly released to the storm drain system instead of the sanitary sewer. Employee awareness of the difference between the storm drain system and the sanitary sewer system was lacking. These systems are found throughout the Laboratory. Berkeley Lab holds a stormwater permit from the Regional Water Quality Control Board which prohibits discharges of most materials other than stormwater to the storm drain system.

Actions Taken:

Discharge was ceased immediately upon discovery by the supervisor. It was determined that the levels of contaminants posed no threat to the environment or the health of the public; however, storm water permit requirements do not permit discharges of this kind in any amount. The release was reported to the City of Berkeley.

Preventive Measures:

A training session, including a video on stormwater protection, was held to discuss the differences between the storm drain and sanitary sewer systems onsite. A short article drawing attention to the differences in the two systems and the need to protect the storm drain from contamination will be placed in the next issue of the EH&S newsletter. The storm drain catch basins onsite will be labeled to increase general awareness of the storm drain system. Training is given on an ongoing basis to groups most likely to work around or have contact with the storm drains, but training is available upon request to any group.

For questions regarding wastewater discharges, contact Ginny Lackner, of the EH&S Division Environmental Protection Group, at extension 7413.